

NEWS RELEASE – MAY 4, 2009

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Tobacco Trust Fund Commission

Central Piedmont Farmers Eligible for Grant Awards

Grants totaling \$750,000 over a three-year period will be awarded to farmers in Central Piedmont counties for special projects in 2010.

Established in 2008 by the N.C. Tobacco Trust Fund Commission, the grant program was put in place to lessen the economic distress caused by soaring input and energy costs and to combat the lingering effects of the state's drought conditions. Current and former tobacco growers are the primary audience for the program; however, any farmers living in tobacco dependent communities are eligible.

The program will be managed by Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI-USA) as the "Tobacco Communities Reinvestment Fund (TCRF)". RAFI will accept applications, award grants and monitor the results. The maximum amount available to individual farmers is \$10,000 and \$30,000 for agricultural cooperatives or community projects.

"We anticipate a large number of farmers benefitting from this unique opportunity," said William Upchurch, Executive Director of the Tobacco Trust Fund Commission. "Our experience has shown that farmers utilize these grants for innovative, resourceful and profitable enterprises that can make a huge impact on their farming operation."

The ultimate impact is preservation of the family farm. Award recipients are encouraged to explore crop diversification, ways to replace lost tobacco income and marketing & production techniques that demonstrate economic sustainability.

"The TCRF is designed to help farmers put their own ideas to work to develop new income sources," said Jason Roehrig, RAFI Program Director. "Through cost-share grants, we can help reduce the risk of trying new ideas."

Examples of past projects have included improved greenhouse vegetable production, supplies for pasture-raised livestock, expansion of nursery operations, farmers market assistance and more.

Interested farmers and representatives of agricultural cooperatives or associations may obtain applications at www.rafiusaorg or by calling 919-542-1396 ext. 205.

During August-October, regional meetings will also review application instructions and project ideas. Applications must be received at the RAFI-USA offices by November 11, 2009. Award recipients will be announced in January, 2010. Grant awards have already been announced in the western parts of North Carolina and coastal plains farmers will have this same opportunity in late summer, 2009.

Project Partners:

Tobacco Trust Fund Commission: www.tobaccotrustfund.org

Established in 2000 by the NC General Assembly to manage funds that are part of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. Grants target farm areas that have historically depended upon tobacco income through farming or tobacco-related businesses.

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RAFI-USA: www.rafiusa.org

Rural Advancement Foundation International

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